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## On a *Phoebetria* specimen from southern Brazil

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A *Phoebetria* albatross from São Paulo, Brazil (Bertioga beach, 28 August 1954, Museum of Zoology of the University of São Paulo, MZUSP) was identified as *P. palpebrata* by Pinto (1964) and Teixeira *et al.* (1988), the latter doubting our identification (1985, based on a suggestion by R. Grantsau) as *P. fusca*. The 1988 paper also cites a secondary source (Sick 1985), but there is no evidence Sick had identified the specimen himself. Sick overlooked September records of *P. fusca* off the Brazilian coast from 33°22'S, 47°41'W to 28°45'S, 41°02'W (Rumboll & Jehl 1977). *P. palpebrata* is a subantarctic species said to occur in southern Brazil (Vooren & Fernandes 1989), although Rumboll recorded it only at and below the subtropical convergence at 40°–45°S.

After re-examining the MZUSP specimen and others in the British Museum (Natural History) and American Museum of Natural History (New York), we confirm the Bertioga bird as *P. fusca*. It is a dark individual, slightly paler-bodied like all *P. fusca* (see picture in Sinclair 1987; Teixeira *et al.* are incorrect in calling *P. fusca* "entirely sooty brown").

The specimen probably would not have been confused with whitish or ashy-bodied *P. palpebrata* except for certain suggestions in Murphy (1936), some repeated in later field guides. Specifically, we urge caution in using his suggestions of culmen shape (as by Pinto 1964) and about juveniles. Teixeira (pers. comm.) thought the MZUSP bird could not be *P. fusca* because it has a dark orange mandibular stripe rather than the orange one of adult *P. fusca* specimens, yet has pale shafts and dark plumage that Murphy describes as adult.

First, the concave culmen that Murphy shows for *P. palpebrata* is variable and changes with viewing angle; at any rate, we find the culmen of the São Paulo specimen rather straight, contra Pinto (1964). The least central depth of the closed bill is 25.0 mm, above averages of *P. fusca* (24.9 mm, s.d. 0.7;  $n=16$ ) or *P. palpebrata* (23.7 mm, s.d. 1.4;  $n=9$ ). Although these means differ significantly ( $t=2.85$ ,  $P<0.005$ ), recent field guides are probably right to omit this as a field character.

Second, young *Phoebetria fusca* have dusky primary shafts (Richard A. Sloss, *in litt.*; downy birds at AMNH) but, contrary to Murphy (1936)

and later field guides, mostly pale shafts by the time they fly (Willis and Sloss, AMNH no. 527083; P. R. Colston *in litt.*, BMNH 1953-55-98). Colston indicates that the last specimen has down on neck, breast and flanks. BM 1953-55-97, also from Tristan da Cunha, is a similar bird ("left the nest too soon" and died after a week in captivity, 22 May 1952) with pale shafts and is almost identical in colour to the São Paulo bird. Thus, the age of flying birds cannot be judged by shaft colour.

Third, the pale-scalloped neck region Murphy (1936) reports for young *P. fusca* seems variable. Some birds (as the BMNH bird that left the nest too soon) have little scalloping, others more. Murphy failed to describe young *P. palpebrata*, which are also variable but can be much more scalloped with pale than are young *P. fusca*. Any scalloping present would show up more in the field in dark young *P. fusca*, since *P. palpebrata* are always pale-bodied, but we would not use lack of scalloping as an indication of age; some dark-billed young seem little more scalloped than adults of their respective species.

Fourth, young *P. fusca* have a dark and not pale stripe on the lower mandible (Harrison 1983; not mentioned in Murphy 1936). Washing one stripe of the São Paulo specimen revealed yellow underneath. We suspect the dark bill stripe may persist for several months after young *P. fusca* go to sea, and that the MZUSP specimen is such a young bird, despite its pale shafts (dark near the tips) and relatively slight neck scalloping.

Like Murphy (1936), we found tails of *P. fusca* slightly shorter than *P. palpebrata*, bills slightly longer. The São Paulo specimen has such a short tail (227 mm) that, among males of the two species, it is only like the Tristan fledgling (225 mm). Perhaps young go to sea with short tails; if so, the short tail of the specimen might be a further indication of immaturity.

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